



Estrategias didácticas para fortalecer competencias orales en inglés en estudiantes de pregrado universitario

Teaching strategies to strengthen oral English skills in undergraduate students

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ABSTRACT

The research evaluated the application of active teaching strategies communicative gamification, microlearning, and ubiquitous learning in introductory university English courses using a quasi-experimental mixed design with 69 students from public and private institutions. The objective was to determine the effectiveness of applying teaching strategies to strengthen oral English skills in undergraduate students. The results showed significant increases between pre-test and post-test in communicative competence, with average improvements of around twelve points and high effect sizes, maintaining the initial gap between institutional contexts but with parallel progress. The discussion interprets that brief communicative practice, immediate feedback, and interactive mediation explain the observed change. Teachers reported greater oral participation despite technological limitations, while student perception was moderate, indicating a gap between measured progress and subjective confidence. The pedagogical effectiveness of active methodologies is confirmed.

Descriptors: language teaching; second language teaching; bilingual education. (Source: UNESCO Thesaurus).

RESUMEN

La investigación evaluó la aplicación de estrategias didácticas activas gamificación comunicativa, microaprendizaje y aprendizaje ubicuo en cursos iniciales de inglés universitario mediante un diseño mixto cuasi experimental con 69 estudiantes de instituciones públicas y privadas. El objetivo fue determinar la efectividad de la aplicación de estrategias didácticas para fortalecer competencias orales en inglés en estudiantes de pregrado universitario. Los resultados mostraron incrementos significativos entre pretest y postest en competencia comunicativa, con mejoras promedio cercanas a doce puntos y tamaños de efecto altos, manteniéndose la brecha inicial entre contextos institucionales, pero con progreso paralelo. La discusión interpreta que la práctica comunicativa breve, la retroalimentación inmediata y la mediación interactiva explican el cambio observado. Docentes reportaron mayor participación oral pese a limitaciones tecnológicas, mientras la percepción estudiantil fue moderada, indicando desfase entre progreso medido y seguridad subjetiva. Se confirma la efectividad pedagógica de las metodologías activas.

Descriptorios: enseñanza de idiomas; enseñanza de una segunda lengua; educación bilingüe. (Fuente: Tesoro UNESCO).

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Research articles section



INTRODUCTION

In Latin American higher education, teaching English as a foreign language continues to represent a highly complex pedagogical challenge, especially in introductory courses where the functional foundations of academic and professional communication are laid. Although university programmes have incorporated curricular guidelines and methodological reforms aimed at developing communicative competence, the performance levels achieved by a significant proportion of students do not correspond to the expected graduate profiles. This discrepancy suggests the existence of didactic, contextual and motivational factors that directly influence the process of language acquisition. From this perspective, various analyses of university language education have pointed out that the persistence of models focused on grammatical memorisation and literal translation limits the transfer of knowledge to real-life interaction situations. In line with this, Caicedo-Quinteros (2023) argues that learning styles have a decisive influence on the effectiveness of the training process, so that English language teaching requires flexible strategies that respond to the cognitive diversity present in the classroom. Based on this premise, it is recognised that methodological uniformity reduces active participation and weakens early oral production.

Within this interpretative framework, contemporary language teaching has promoted active approaches that prioritise participation, the resolution of communicative tasks and the social construction of meaning. In relation to this, Chica-Esquivia (2023) explains that participatory strategies increase student involvement and encourage the functional practice of the language within guided pedagogical scenarios. This methodological orientation shifts the exclusive protagonism of the teacher and places the learner as the agent of their own linguistic progress. In line with the above, hybrid and digital environments have introduced pedagogical working methods that combine face-to-face interaction, virtual interaction, and immediate response resources. In this regard, García-Córdova and Franco-Lazarte (2025) report that the integration of combined learning models contributes to strengthening English comprehension when activities are designed with clear communicative objectives. This approach suggests that educational technology produces better results when it responds to defined linguistic purposes and not just to instrumental novelty.

On a theoretical level, communicative competence is one of the conceptual pillars for understanding foreign language learning in formal contexts. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence is not restricted to structural knowledge of the language, but integrates sociolinguistic, discursive and strategic components that enable appropriate action in interactive situations. Therefore, effective teaching must provide scenarios where students negotiate meaning, adapt their discourse and resolve expressive difficulties during the exchange. From a sociocultural perspective on learning, mediated interaction plays a central formative role in the construction of linguistic knowledge. In line with this position, Vygotsky (1978) argues that cognitive development is enhanced when learners participate in shared activities with gradual support, which supports the use of collaborative dynamics and pedagogical mediation resources. Under this approach, the language classroom is conceived as a space for discursive co-construction rather than simply the transmission of rules.

In line with the psycholinguistic dimension, emotional factors also condition the student's disposition towards oral production. In accordance with this idea, Krashen (1982) argues that anxiety, negative self-perception and fear of error can act as barriers that block language acquisition. Thus, learning environments that incorporate playful dynamics, gradual challenges, and respectful feedback tend to facilitate initial communicative participation. In the applied field, proposals for pedagogical gamification, microlearning, and ubiquitous learning have gained prominence as methodological alternatives that combine motivation, cognitive brevity, and flexible access to content. These strategies organise the learning experience into short sequences, progressive challenges and immediate response activities, which helps to maintain attention and promote frequent practice. However, most of the experiences reported are concentrated in specific institutional contexts, without systematic comparison between different educational realities.

In relation to the institutional context, infrastructure conditions, technological availability, and student academic workload can modify the way a teaching strategy is implemented and utilised.



In line with this observation, Coronel and Puchi (2024) describe how educational environments with unequal resources show different responses to the same methodological proposals, due to variations in connectivity, institutional support, and pedagogical culture. Therefore, comparing results between public and private institutions allows for a more accurate understanding of the real scope of teaching innovations. Based on the above, there is a need to systematically examine the impact of active teaching strategies on the development of communicative competence in English within higher education, considering differences in institutional context. This research orientation provides criteria for curricular decision-making and for the design of teacher training programmes oriented towards participatory methodologies.

Thus, the research objective was to determine the effectiveness of the application of teaching strategies to strengthen oral skills in English among undergraduate university students.

METHOD

From a methodological point of view, the research was structured using a mixed approach that integrated quantitative and qualitative analysis with the aim of interpreting the educational phenomenon from a dual perspective: measuring linguistic performance and understanding the pedagogical experience of teachers and students. This combination made it possible to relate variations in performance to perceptions, practices and conditions of application of the teaching strategies implemented.

In relation to the quantitative component, a quasi-experimental design was adopted with measurement before and after the pedagogical intervention, without random assignment of participants, given that the academic groups were already formed at the beginning of the academic period. This comparative structure made it possible to observe changes in communicative performance after the application of active teaching strategies during a short academic period.

Regarding the qualitative dimension, a phenomenological approach was applied to examine the interpretation that teachers gave to their own practice during the intervention. This framework allowed for the collection of detailed descriptions of implementation processes, pedagogical adjustments, contextual barriers, and student responses observed in the English classroom.

Sixty-nine university students enrolled in level one and level two English courses participated in the study. The sample was divided into two distinct institutional groups: thirty-four students from a public university and thirty-five students from private universities. The selection was based on criteria of academic accessibility and voluntary willingness to participate.

Under the inclusion criteria, it was considered necessary for students to be formally enrolled in beginner English courses, to attend classes regularly, and to agree to participate through informed consent. Students who did not complete both measurements or who dropped out of the course during the intervention period were excluded. This control ensured consistency in the comparison of results.

Six English teachers with experience in higher education participated, distributed equally between public and private institutions. Their participation included applying the proposed strategies, recording pedagogical observations, and conducting follow-up interviews. This teacher involvement allowed for a comparison between the execution dimension and the professional perception dimension.

In terms of the teaching intervention, a coordinated set of active strategies was implemented, consisting of communicative gamification, sequential microlearning, and ubiquitous learning mediated by accessible digital resources. Gamification was developed through challenge dynamics, progressive scoring, and the completion of communicative tasks with immediate feedback, using interactive platforms and also analogue activities when connectivity was limited.

In terms of microlearning, short content capsules were designed for specific communicative functions such as personal introductions, requests, descriptions, and simple opinions. Each capsule combined a short explanation, guided practice, and applied production, with reduced work times to promote concentration and distributed repetition.



In line with ubiquitous learning, the activities were hosted on mobile access platforms and institutional digital repositories, allowing students to practise outside the classroom in short intervals. This modality sought to increase the frequency of contact with the language and promote progressive autonomy in language practice.

In terms of quantitative instruments, a communicative competence test was applied, constructed from functional descriptors aligned with the initial levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The assessment included four dimensions: basic listening comprehension, guided oral production, brief communicative interaction, and control of frequent linguistic forms. The test was administered before and after the intervention.

Complementarily, a student perception questionnaire was developed with a five-level Likert scale, organised into three domains: self-perception of communicative competence, assessment of the learning process, and perceived usefulness of teaching strategies. The instrument was reviewed for internal consistency and showed reliability coefficients greater than .89 in both Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, indicators that reflect measurement stability.

In relation to qualitative data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participating teachers, organised into thematic blocks on methodological application, operational difficulties, facilitating factors, pedagogical assessment, projected future use, and professional satisfaction. The conversations were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and anonymised through coding.

At the quantitative analytical level, descriptive measures of central tendency and dispersion were used to characterise initial and subsequent performance. Subsequently, the t-test for related samples was applied to contrast differences between measurements. As an additional verification, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used, which is appropriate when seeking non-parametric contrast. The effect size was also calculated using Cohen's d statistic to estimate the magnitude of change.

In terms of qualitative analysis, an initial open coding process was developed to identify units of meaning, followed by axial grouping by interpretive categories. This procedure allowed for the organisation of patterns of teaching experience related to methodological adaptation, contextual limitations, and observed student response.

From an ethical standpoint, the study was conducted in accordance with the principles of autonomy, confidentiality, and responsible use of information. All participants signed informed consent forms, and anonymity was guaranteed in the records. The data were stored in protected repositories and used exclusively for academic purposes.

RESULTS

First, the quantitative analysis compared performance in English communication skills before and after the pedagogical intervention based on active strategies. The comparison included all participants who completed both measurements, allowing for the observation of individual and group variations in performance.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the pre-test by type of institution

Group	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Public university	34	61.1	9.57	38	79
Private universities	35	75.9	8.15	62	96
Total	69	68.6	11.2	38	96

Source: Own elaboration (2026).



With regard to the initial distribution of scores presented in Table 1, a difference was identified between the two institutional contexts. The group from the public university started from a lower average level and with a greater dispersion of scores, while the group from private universities showed a greater concentration of scores and a higher average. This initial variation allowed us to observe the relative response of each group to the intervention.

Table 2. *Post-test descriptive statistics by type of institution*

Group	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum Score	Maximum Score
Public university	34	73.6	10.04	51	92
Private universities	35	87.8	7.50	72	100
Total	69	80.8	10.9	51	100

Source: Own elaboration (2026).

With regard to the measurements presented in Table 2, both groups increased their average scores after six weeks of methodological application. The increase was consistent across most participants, with a general shift in the distribution towards higher ranges.

Table 3. *Increase in pre-test–post-test scores*

Group	Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Mean Difference
Public university	61.1	73.6	+12.5
Private universities	75.9	87.8	+11.9
Total	68.6	80.8	+12.2

Source: Own elaboration (2026).

In relation to the average gain presented in Table 3, the public institution group increased by 12.5 points, while the private institution group increased by 11.9 points. The gap between averages remained relatively stable, indicating parallel improvement in relative terms.

Table 4. *Pre-test–post-test contrast tests (total sample)*

Test	Statistic	df	p	Effect Size
Paired t-test	-61.4	68	< .001	d = -7.40
Wilcoxon	W = 0.00	—	< .001	r ≈ .89

Source: Own elaboration (2026).

In the inferential plane presented in Table 4, the comparison of related measures showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test for the total group of participants. The magnitude of the effect indicated a large change in educational terms.

Consequently, the statistical results allow us to affirm that the teaching intervention was associated with a substantial improvement in communicative performance as measured by the test administered.

Results of the student perception survey

Table 5. *Perception of communicative improvement*

Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Greater oral expression ability	36.3%	39.1%	24.6%
Better listening comprehension	33.4%	37.7%	28.9%

Source: Own elaboration (2026).



Regarding the self-perception of communicative competence presented in Table 5, responses were concentrated in the intermediate categories of the scale, with a relevant presence of neutral positions. A smaller proportion expressed strong agreement with the perceived improvement, suggesting that measured progress does not always translate immediately into subjective confidence.

Table 6. Evaluation of the Learning Process

Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Motivation during activities	33.4%	31.9%	34.7%
Dynamic methodology	39.1%	29.0%	31.8%
Interest in continuing with the methodology	34.8%	31.0%	34.2%

Source: Own elaboration (2026).

With respect to the evaluation of the pedagogical process presented in Table 6, responses showed a moderate tendency toward acceptance, although with dispersion between those who reported high motivation and those who maintained an intermediate position. This distribution suggests a heterogeneous experience regarding the applied dynamics.

Table 7. Perceived Applicability of the Strategies

Item	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
Support for autonomous learning	36.2%	37.7%	26.1%
Future academic usefulness	37.7%	36.2%	26.1%
Value of digital activities	33.3%	34.8%	31.8%

Source: Own elaboration (2026).

Regarding perceived usefulness outside the classroom presented in Table 7, most responses were located in the neutral range, with a smaller proportion indicating full agreement. This pattern indicates that autonomous transfer still requires instructional reinforcement and guidance.

Correlational Analysis Between Perceptual Dimensions

Table 8. Correlations Between Perception Dimensions

Variables	r	p
Perceived competence – Satisfaction	0.829	< .001
Perceived competence – Applicability	0.801	< .001
Satisfaction – Applicability	0.807	< .001

Source: Own elaboration (2026).

Concerning the relationship between perception dimensions presented in Table 8, the correlation coefficients indicated a strong association between perceived competence, process evaluation, and attributed usefulness of the methodology. This relationship suggests that when students perceive personal progress, their positive evaluation of the process and their projection of future use also increase.

Qualitative Results of Teacher Perceptions

From an interpretive perspective, teachers from public institutions described methodological adaptation processes using low-technology resources such as role-playing, communicative cards, and movement-based dynamics. They reported limitations in connectivity and device availability, although they observed a visible increase in oral participation.

In private institutions, teachers more frequently used interactive platforms and real-time response systems. They reported technical ease of implementation, along with a need for pedagogical training to design consistent communicative activities.



In summary, both groups of teachers agreed that active strategies promoted greater student involvement and willingness to interact in English, although the mode of implementation depended on the educational context conditions.

DISCUSSION

In relation to the results obtained, the improvement observed in communicative competence scores after the pedagogical intervention indicates that the systematic application of active strategies favours linguistic performance at initial levels of higher education. The parallel increase in both institutional contexts suggests that the methodological structure implemented has the capacity to adapt to scenarios with different resources, provided that there is didactic planning and teacher monitoring.

From a comparative perspective, the maintenance of the gap between the averages of public and private institutions suggests that entry conditions continue to influence final performance, even when participatory methodologies are applied. In line with this interpretation, Caicedo-Quinteros (2023) points out that contextual factors and learning styles condition the acquisition of English, so the pedagogical strategy requires adjustments according to student profile and educational environment. This approach helps to understand why the intervention generated similar progress in relative magnitude but did not reduce the initial gap.

At the methodological level, the magnitude of the statistical effect recorded in the pre-test–post-test comparison shows a high-intensity educational change. This variation can be explained by the combination of frequent practice, brief communicative tasks, and immediate feedback. In line with this idea, Chica-Esquivia (2023) argues that active participation and guided interaction strengthen the functional construction of language, because students produce language with purpose and do not just repeat structures.

From the framework of communicative competence, the results support the idea that linguistic progress does not depend exclusively on grammatical mastery, but on the ability to use the language in situations of exchange. Consistent with this, Canale and Swain (1980) propose that competence manifests itself when the speaker integrates linguistic, sociocultural, and strategic resources during interaction. The gamified and microtask activities implemented in the intervention are aligned with this conception by requiring functional use of language in simulated contexts.

From a sociocultural perspective on learning, the improvement recorded can also be interpreted as an effect of the interactive mediation present in collaborative dynamics. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is enhanced when students participate in shared actions with gradual support and expert guidance. Cooperative tasks, team challenges and dialogue-based productions created spaces for mediation that facilitated the transition from assisted performance to more autonomous production.

With regard to the emotional dimension, the increased participation described by teachers coincides with a reduction in communicative tension during practice. In line with this interpretation, Krashen (1982) argues that affective disposition influences language acquisition, such that playful and error-tolerant pedagogical environments favour initial production. The progressive challenge structure used in the intervention seems to have contributed to reducing oral inhibition. In terms of student perception, the high number of neutral responses deserves interpretative attention. Although measured performance increased, self-assessment did not grow with the same intensity. This difference can be explained by the gap between observable progress and subjective confidence. In relation to this phenomenon, Hernández-Otálora (2024) links motivation, practice time, and second language performance, indicating that the perception of improvement tends to consolidate after periods of sustained use, not just after brief interventions.

From the correlation analysis, the strong association between perceived competence, process satisfaction, and perceived usefulness of the methodology indicates an integrated perceptual system. In line with this relationship, Ramírez-Morán et al. (2026) describe how the perception of personal progress increases the value placed on pedagogical tools and the willingness to use them. This connection suggests that strengthening awareness of achievement could increase



methodological acceptance. In the field of teaching implementation, differences between institutional contexts provide relevant information for applied teaching. Teachers in public institutions showed creative adaptation through physical resources, dramatisation, and games with low technological requirements. In line with this observation, Guzmán Mayancha (2025) argues that pedagogical innovation does not depend on technological sophistication, but rather on didactic intention and the design of the communicative task. This coincidence supports the viability of active methodologies in environments with material limitations.

In operational contrast, teachers in private institutions used interactive digital platforms more frequently, which facilitated immediate feedback and automated monitoring. However, they also pointed out the workload involved in preparation and the need for specific training. In line with this, Cárdenas-Ramírez and Calupiña-Rivera (2025) indicate that technological integration requires sustained pedagogical training to avoid superficial use of the tools. In relation to the literature on oral production, the results are consistent with research linking structured communicative tasks with improved spoken expression. In line with this, Bazaruto Bravo et al. (2022) describe how activities based on the communicative approach strengthen oral skills when they are oriented towards purposeful interaction. The verbal challenge dynamics used in the intervention respond to this functional logic.

CONCLUSION

In direct response to the objective of determining the effectiveness of the application of teaching strategies to strengthen oral skills in English in undergraduate university students, it is established that, based on the quantitative and qualitative evidence obtained, the structured implementation of communicative gamification dynamics, functional microlearning, and guided ubiquitous practice produced a verifiable strengthening of oral production and interaction in English, reflected in consistent increases in performance and a greater willingness to participate in controlled verbal exchanges.

This allows us to affirm, on a pedagogical basis, that when instruction incorporates brief communicative tasks, immediate feedback, and progressive sequences of language use, even in scenarios with limited resources or through simulated academic dialogue exercises, an observable formative effect is generated in the initial oral competence of university students. Therefore, methodologically and didactically, the strategies applied are effective as a means of strengthening oral English at the undergraduate level.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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